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Heritage Ottawa NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to Preserving Our Built Heritage

November 2024 Volume 51, No. 4

Heritage or housing?: Housing crisis challenges City of Ottawa to reconsider priorities

By Maia Tustonic



Third Avenue streetscape, Ottawa

Red-brick homes, 100-year-old façades, architectural history — Ottawa's charm is rooted in the rows of heritage buildings that line its streets, and heritage conservation is key to the city's cultural, historic and tourist appeal.

However, the housing supply shortage and the push to develop more homes

in response to the housing crisis have sparked a reconsideration of built heritage as a priority. Between January 1 and October 30, Ottawa's Built Heritage Committee has considered 16 applications to alter or completely replace heritage buildings, many in favour of larger residential developments.

Photo: Heritage Ottawa

Heritage Ottawa NEWSLETTER

Heritage Ottawa is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Ottawa's built heritage.

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Heritage or housing? continued...

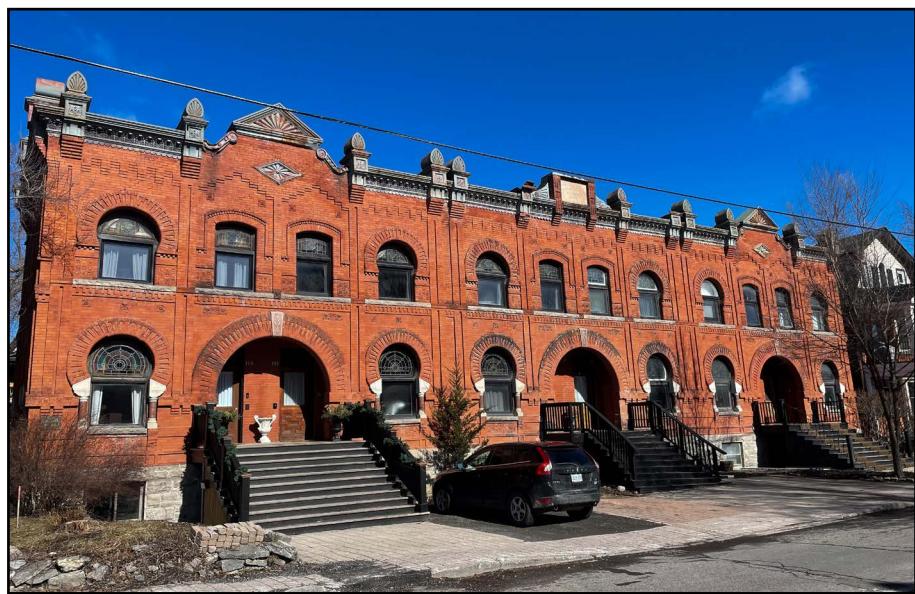


Photo: Maia Tustonic

Chris Wiebe says 128 James St. is a good example of how heritage buildings can be changed to house more residents while maintaining their historic appearance and value. Originally only three residences, this building now contains 11 units.

As priorities shift to increasing housing supply amid the housing crisis, advocates are worried the importance of heritage preservation is falling to the wayside. However, with over 4,000 Ottawans in precarious housing situations, heritage conservation may seem like a luxury.

“We certainly have a supply issue,” said Kaite Burkholder Harris, executive director of the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa. Unable to buy a home, people start renting, she said, which drives up rental prices and prevents people from accessing affordable housing.

As of October 2023, the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Ottawa was just over \$1,400. Last year, the median sale price of a single-family home was over \$730,000 — an increase of more than \$230,000 from 2019. To alleviate the housing crisis, the Ontario government is aiming to add 151,000 housing units to Ottawa’s supply by 2031. In 2023, the number

of new construction units completed in the city was just over 9,000.

In November 2022, the Ontario government passed its *More Homes Built Faster Act*, part of which amended the *Ontario Heritage Act*, which protects designated heritage buildings. Now, heritage buildings must meet more qualifications to be officially designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Additionally, all buildings listed on municipal heritage registers will be removed on January 1, 2027, provoking a municipal rush to designate and protect heritage buildings before time runs out. The goal of these changes was to “reduce red tape and remove barriers that are slowing down housing construction,” according to the act’s consultation website.

However, this reasoning may be less relevant than imagined, according to Linda Hoad, a member of Heritage Ottawa’s Advocacy Committee. “In Ottawa, the number of designated buildings or buildings that are on the

[heritage] register that have prevented the construction of housing is very limited,” she said. Heritage expert Marc Denhez said heritage considerations don’t make “one iota” of difference when it comes to housing development. In fact, protected heritage buildings and districts make up less than one per cent of Ontario’s almost 5.5 million homes.

Chris Wiebe, the manager of heritage policy at the National Trust for Canada, acknowledged a few “high-profile cases” where heritage conservation was used to block development. Those cases “undermine” actual heritage work, Wiebe said. “It kind of paints all heritage activity with that NIMBY [not in my backyard] brush.”

Protecting Ottawa’s history or future?

However, the heritage community has work to do to balance heritage with the need for housing, Wiebe said. “I think, for one, here the heritage community needs to do better. It needs to be more pragmatic,” Wiebe said. He pointed to façadism, where only the front of a building is preserved and new developments are built behind it, as an example of where heritage planners have “compromised a lot.”

Façadism is especially prevalent in Centretown, home to two heritage conservation districts. The Centretown Community Association’s heritage working group, chaired by Jack Hanna, proposed that the city approve two more districts. Heritage districts don’t stop development, Hanna said, but they do ensure new developments fit within existing historic streetscapes.

“If you walk down some of the streets around the Golden Triangle

“Heritage is what exists,” Hahn said. “There’s a line that says the greenest building is the one that’s already built.”

[neighbourhood], you get the same feeling as if you’re at a place from another time,” Hanna said. “We want to keep those streetscapes.” Densification within the heritage district can be achieved by façadism, he said, and the community association supports the evolution of buildings in their community.

“We’re desperate for more places to live, especially affordable,” he said. “It needs to happen and cities are going to change [...] part of making them livable is heritage streetscapes. We can have both. It’s not either/or.”

Heritage Ottawa, however, sees façadism as a “less-satisfactory” solution, according to Hoad. Adaptive reuse, which repurposes existing buildings, is a more desirable option, she said. But a variety of legal, political, and financial obstacles impede repurposing and renovating buildings, according to Denhez. Demolition of heritage buildings is more likely than renovation, he said, due to a lack of training that drives up restoration costs. The required paperwork for demolition is also less complicated than paperwork for heritage designation, he said.

‘Complex’ debate on priorities and solutions

Contrary to popular belief, preserving what exists can be more cost-effective, environmentally sustainable and supportive of local workers, according to Christopher Hahn, dean of Algonquin College’s Perth, Ont., campus, which hosts the school’s heritage institute. “Heritage is what exists,” Hahn said. “There’s a line



An example of façadism at 282 O’Connor St. Developers preserved the front parts of two Victorian-era houses and built them into a six-story modern mid-rise.

that says the greenest building is the one that's already built."

Demolition and reconstruction are less sustainable than preservation, Hahn said, because of the increased wreckage in landfills and carbon cost of making and transporting new materials. To make development more climate-conscious, Hahn said there needs to be a mindset shift. "It's not so much that people need to justify why something needs to be kept," he said. "I think we need to change it to say we have to now justify why it has to be torn down, from a climate-change and embodied-carbon perspective."

Using existing buildings as a response to the housing crisis also

makes more sense to Denhez.

"I wouldn't have started by saying, 'Well, we want to create housing, so why don't we start by knocking down housing?'" New developments should start in parking lots or dead strip malls, he suggested, or the development of "secondary suites" within existing buildings.

Heritage buildings can be repurposed for affordable housing like 44 Eccles St. which now hosts Cornerstone Housing for Women. Or a heritage property can accommodate a mixed-use development such as St-Charles Market, which is now home to 56 apartments and three commercial spaces while preserving the former Saint-Charles Church.

From outside the heritage community, it's clear that the issue is "complex," Burkholder Harris said, but a re-examination of priorities may be necessary. "We're at a point where we have to make tough decisions," she said, noting how homelessness is deeply intertwined with the lack of housing supply. "It's not always that stark or that black and white, but that's where we're at with the housing crisis."

Maia Tustonic is a third-year journalism student at Carleton University. She enjoys reporting on city politics, innovation and sustainability.

Heritage Ottawa encourages readers to respond to the challenges raised in this article: info@heritageottawa.org.



Photo: Heritage Ottawa

The designated church has been preserved and a mixed-use development wrapped around it, consisting of 56 apartments and three commercial spaces.

A Sustainable Future in the ByWard Market and Lowertown Heritage Conservation Districts: Empowering Realtors and Buyers with Knowledge

By Curtis Wolfe

As Ottawa's historic ByWard Market and Lowertown face pressure from real estate developers, a new initiative aims to protect its architectural legacy by ensuring realtors and buyers are fully informed about the significance, requirements and benefits of owning heritage properties.

In November 2023, a realtor listed 95-97 St. Andrew Street as ideal for demolition and redevelopment. This building was constructed in 1875 and was initially home to the Olivier family—one of Bytown's earliest—including Louis-Adolphe Olivier, appointed Ontario's first Francophone judge in 1888. In June, a realtor encouraged the demolition of another heritage property at its open house showing, seemingly unaware of its designated status. Neither realtor seemed to be aware that both properties were contributing buildings to the Lowertown West Heritage Conservation District (HCD) established in the early 1990s.

The Heritage Committee of the Lowertown Community Association (LCA) therefore decided to develop an information package for realtors and potential purchasers of heritage properties to inform them of the requirements and benefits of owning a heritage property.

The package includes: i) a letter to realtors asking them to acknowledge the heritage status of a property; ii) a welcome letter to purchasers encouraging them to help conserve Ottawa's built-heritage; and iii) a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) flyer that demystifies such topics as



95-97 St. Andrew Street, 1938

HCDs, when heritage permits are required, and provides information about the City's Heritage Property Grant Program for building restoration. (see page 10)

During the drafting process, both city staff and realtors were consulted,

and the City's Heritage Planning Branch agreed to endorse and co-sign the letter to realtors and the FAQ.

The LCA Heritage Committee also monitors automated realtor listing notifications for the ByWard Market and Lowertown and shares



95-97 St. Andrew Street, September 2024

these documents with realtors. Seeking the assistance of realtors has the advantage of connecting with interested buyers, including corporations, landlords or foreign owners whose addresses may not be readily available to the community. To date, the response from recipients has been positive, especially from those realtors who were not well-informed about heritage properties. Realtors have also expressed appreciation for the constructive and

welcoming tone of the message, and they are supportive of the initiative to engage and welcome new residents into the community.

While not a panacea, the LCA takes pride in having taken a practical step to inform realtors and developers about heritage properties. We hope these documents will prevent further uninformed purchases of heritage property by developers for demolition and new construction.

We also believe that by being clear about the requirements and benefits of participating in the stewardship of Ottawa's heritage, new owners will take pride in being part of a larger community of heritage enthusiasts and become willing participants in the city's architectural conservation.

Curtis Wolfe is a Lowertown Community Association Heritage Committee member.

IN MEMORIAM Robert Smythe: A pillar of Centretown

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of historian, journalist, heritage advocate and tireless volunteer **Robert Smythe** who died on Friday, November 15 at the Ottawa Heart Institute.

Robert was a Centretown giant who contributed so much to the community for many decades. He was the long-time editor of the Centretown BUZZ (named for his style of haircut) and remained a regular contributor writing articles about local history, architectural heritage and urban affairs.

Robert was the creator and author of Urbsite, a blog and website dedicated to the history, urban planning, and architecture of Centretown. A treasure trove of information, each entry was researched in depth and illustrated with photos, maps and plans.

Robert was a sought-after lecturer on the history of downtown Ottawa. He generously gave his time to Heritage Ottawa's lecture series with two recent talks on the



birth of Ottawa's department stores and the rise of apartment towers in the post Second World War years.

He readily agreed to contribute his knowledge and research skills to Heritage Ottawa's book *From Walk-Up to High-Rise: Ottawa's Historic Apartment Buildings*, first published in 2017. As well as writing several sections, he helped to review content and promote the book.

Robert worked as a staffer to Councillor Diane Holmes, and volunteered with the Centretown Community Association and the Centretown Citizens Ottawa

Corporation, a non-profit dedicated to affordable housing. A prolific walker, Robert was a recognized figure on Elgin Street and elsewhere around Centretown.

Heritage Ottawa extends our condolences to Robert's family and friends. We are deeply honoured that donations in his memory are being directed to Heritage Ottawa.

For further details please see: <https://ottawacitizen.com/remembering.ca/obituary/robert-smythe-1092319610>

Le fédéral improvise la «déconstruction» du pont Alexandra

Par Claude Royer

La Coalition pour le pont Alexandra a pu rallier des élus locaux à son opposition au projet de le démolir, et continuer à dénoncer l'improvisation du gouvernement fédéral.

Une décision hâtive prise malgré des avis contraires à l'interne

Le pont est une propriété fédérale gérée par Travaux publics, aujourd'hui affilié à Services publics et approvisionnement Canada (SPAC). Dans un contexte politique priorisant d'augmenter à tout prix la capacité des liens autoroutiers interprovinciaux, le gouvernement décide à la hâte en 2019 de démolir le pont malgré l'opposition d'ingénieurs à l'interne révélée par nos demandes d'accès à l'information.

Le Conseil municipal de Gatineau réagit

Ce n'est que cinq ans après avoir pris

la décision de démolir, que SPAC et la CCN prennent enfin la peine de présenter le projet de remplacement aux élus de Gatineau et d'Ottawa.

La présentation du projet de SPAC devant le Conseil plénier du 2 juillet dernier fut un échec retentissant, comme le rapporte le journal *Le Droit* le même jour. Le conseil municipal de Gatineau n'apprécie pas que SPAC évacue toute discussion de réhabiliter le pont patrimonial. Les élus ont de plus souligné l'incohérence de l'abandon du pont Alexandra alors que le fédéral a fait l'annonce en mai d'investir 40 M\$ par année pour assurer la pérennité du vieux pont de Québec, un ouvrage d'acier de plus de 100 ans. En point de presse, la mairesse Marquis-Bissonnette a résumé la position du Conseil voulant que l'option de préserver le pont demeurait l'option préférable jusqu'à preuve du contraire.

Rencontre avec des élus d'Ottawa

SPAC s'est ensuite présenté devant le Comité du patrimoine bâti d'Ottawa le 9 juillet, pour y plaider la soi-disant nécessité de construire un lien autoroutier, en contradiction avec les politiques d'apaisement de la circulation dans la Basse-Ville. Patrimoine Ottawa a pu faire valoir au comité que la structure de plus de 120 ans méritait d'être préservé pour sa valeur historique, à l'exemple d'autres ponts anciens au pays et ailleurs dans le monde. La conseillère Plante co-présidente du comité n'a pas manqué de souligner les connaissances et la validité des arguments des défenseurs du pont Alexandra.

À la suite de ses déconvenues devant les élus municipaux, SPAC a organisé une conférence de presse impromptue le 10 juillet dans la zone sécurisée de la



Colline, interdite au public. SPAC affirme alors que le pont doit être démolie, quel que soit son usage futur, en s'appuyant sur un rapport technique biaisé commandé à un tiers sans expérience en conservation patrimoniale et produit, au pied levé, plus de 3 ans après la décision de démolir.

Démembrement du comité d'experts et consultation sur trois options

En 2023, SPAC et la CCN avaient annoncé en grande pompe avoir confié à un comité d'examen indépendant (CEI), sous l'égide l'Institut royal d'architecture du Canada (IRAC), la tâche d'assurer un encadrement professionnel lors de l'élaboration de trois options de design pour remplacer le pont. Le comité devait aussi sélectionner l'option finale. Ce comité de 11 experts de calibre international

comptait entre autres Barry Padolsky (OC), architecte bien connu.

Contre toute attente, nous avons appris en octobre dernier que SPAC avait secrètement démembré le CEI avant même que les trois options ne soient annoncées au public. Selon la CCN, les responsabilités du comité sont maintenant assumées «à l'interne», sans justification officielle. Ce revirement démontre encore le manque de transparence et l'improvisation associés au projet de démolition.

La CCN a donc poursuivi son plan de consultations en octobre dernier avec une présentation au public de trois options de remplacement soi-disant «emblématiques» et supposément moins coûteuses que la préservation du pont actuel. Par ailleurs, malgré les questions persistantes, SPAC et la CCN ont refusé de préciser les coûts de ces de remplacement.

Conclusion

Jusqu'à ce qu'elle obtienne gain de cause, la Coalition continuera ses demandes auprès du gouvernement actuel ou futur à reconsidérer la décision de démolir le pont Alexandra, un monument de grande importance dans notre histoire et notre paysage. De plus, la Coalition encourage tous à contacter leurs associations civiques et leurs élus à faire part de leur désir de préserver ce joyau de notre patrimoine.

Les élections fédérales à venir en seront la parfaite occasion!

The English translation of this article can be read at heritageottawa.org/alexandra-bridge.

Claude Royer est le porte-parole francophone de la Coalition pour le pont Alexandra.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Heritage Ottawa is looking for a volunteer treasurer to lead the financial management of our vibrant and growing organization.

The ideal candidate is an accountant, active or retired, who would like to join our team.

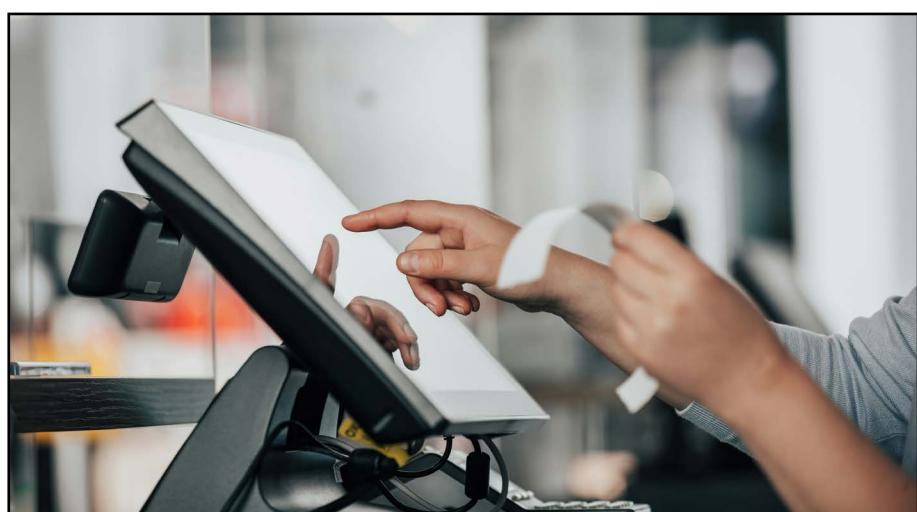
The treasurer has signing authority and is supported by a bookkeeper, able volunteers, and QuickBooks online.

Knowledge and experience managing financial affairs of a business or not-for-profit are essential. Responsibilities include developing the annual operating budget, processing payments, issuing invoices, assembling information

for the bookkeeper, reporting to the membership at the Annual General Meeting.

For more information and/or to

express an interest, please contact us at info@heritageottawa.org. A summary of your experience would be much appreciated.



The Central Experimental Farm Hosts Open House and Bug Day

By *Leslie Maitland*

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) hosted an Open House and Bug Day on Saturday, the 7th of September, at the Central Experimental Farm National Historic Site of Canada. And what a successful day it was! Over 1600 visitors came out to learn about the internationally respected scientific research that goes on behind the scenes, and to get up close and personal with the bug collection. Heritage Ottawa was invited to participate, and we engaged with quite a few of those 1600 people!

Leslie Maitland is a volunteer with Heritage Ottawa



Heritage Ottawa President Katherine Spencer Ross and volunteer Leslie Maitland get friendly with the AAFC bug mascot and bee keeper.

Photo: Heritage Ottawa

Patrimoine industriel à Gatineau

Par *Robert Pajot*

Après une absence de presque 12 ans en Outaouais, l'Association québécoise pour le patrimoine industriel (Aqqi) a tenu son congrès annuel à Gatineau les 17 et 18 octobre sous le thème "Présent et avenir des bâtiments et des quartiers industriels".

Le congrès témoigne du regard attentif au patrimoine industriel porté par l'Aqqi depuis plus que 35 ans. Dans les autres provinces canadiennes, aucune organisation semblable fait la promotion, l'étude, la connaissance, la conservation et la mise en valeur du patrimoine industriel au pays.

Les présentations du congrès s'attardaient, entre-autres, sur l'impact des industries sur la trame



La Fonderie 211, rue Montcalm

urbaine, sur les aspects techniques de la conservation et de la mise en valeur des résidences ouvrières et sur la communication de l'histoire orale des résidents des quartiers industriels. Le congrès s'est conclu avec une visite à pied des sites industriels du vieux Hull, dont l'ancien château d'eau (les Brasseurs du temps), la Fonderie (Hull Iron and Steel), la Filature centre d'art contemporain (Hanson Woolen

Mills), le Théâtre de l'Île (premier aqueduc de Hull) et le bâtiment no 6 de la EB Eddy (le futur emplacement du Musée régional de l'Outaouais).

Pour en savoir plus sur l'Aqqi, visitez le www.aqqi.qc.ca

Robert Pajot est membre du Conseil d'administration de Patrimoine Ottawa.

Correction

In our Summer issue article "Britannia Village: New Heritage Designations" it was incorrectly reported that eight historic Britannia Village properties were designated when it was only seven (195 Bradford Street was not included).

Photo : Robert Pajot



Heritage Ottawa gratefully thanks **Flora Hall Brewing** and **Perfect Books** for supporting the publication of this Newsletter.

Patrimoine Ottawa remercie sincèrement **Flora Hall Brewing** et **Perfect Books** de leur appui à la publication de ce bulletin.

Good News for Owners of Heritage Property – Grants Revised to include Non-Profit and Charitable Organizations

Heritage Ottawa was very pleased to learn at a recent Built Heritage Committee that the Heritage Property Grant Program has been revised. In addition to the existing matching grants available to the owners of buildings designated under Part IV or Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, there will now be a new category of grants for non-profit and charitable organizations who own designated heritage properties.

Matching grant

A heritage grant of up to \$10,000 for small-scale buildings, and up to \$35,000 for large-scale buildings is available on a matching basis to assist owners of heritage buildings to carry

out restoration work. An owner can apply for grant funding once every two years.

Cost sharing grant

The cost sharing grant offers up to 75 per cent of costs to a maximum of \$75,000 and is only available to incorporated not-for-profit organizations and charitable organizations who own designated heritage properties. The intention of this stream is to support projects that would meaningfully contribute to the conservation of these important buildings through larger scale projects. Property owners are eligible to receive grant funding under this stream once every five years.

Applications for the 2025 Heritage Property Grant Program will be accepted from October 1 to November 29, 2024.

The grant program is based on availability of funding which is approved by City Council as part of the annual budget. Program guidelines and application forms are available on the City of Ottawa website:

<https://ottawa.ca/en/planning-development-and-construction/heritage-conservation/built-heritage-funding-programs#section-2d1e0369-de9b-4942-b87f-9aecd31adc3a>

BOOK REVIEW

Pathways to the Trees at the Central Experimental Farm

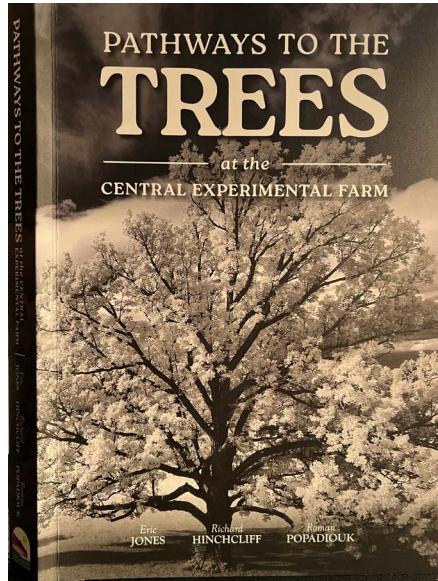
Eric Jones, Richard Hinchcliff and Roman Popadiouk. Ottawa: Friends of the Central Experimental Farm, 2024. 340 pages. \$25.00.

By Carolyn Quinn

Pathways to the Trees at the Central Experimental Farm is a wonderful addition to the collection of books published by the Friends of the Farm. Its release is timely. Raising awareness about the impact that trees have on soil, air quality, temperatures, and water conservation is vitally important as we witness the impacts of climate change and the pressures of urban development. And it is a reminder that the ongoing research and experimentation on the Farm has been contributing to tree science in Canada for over 130 years.

The Farm has a remarkable number of trees, made up of 125 rare and familiar species. The acquisition of trees from across Canada and around the world, along with research into their viability in the Canadian climate, began soon after the Farm was founded, with the first specimens being planted in 1889.

The book showcases a selection of the Farm's trees, and the nature and the conditions in which they were planted. The trees are organized into groups along pathways, creating a series of eight exploratory "Walks": six in the Arboretum (Conifer, Lookout, Lowland and Shoreline, North Path, Prince of Wales, and South Path), one on the Main Campus, and one along the Merivale Shelterbelt. In this way, the book acts as a guide to locate the selected trees along each Walk and to learn



about their history, the relationship among the trees and the impacts of their changing environment.

Entries also include tidbits on how people used trees as either sources of nourishment or to fashion tools, implements, and even structures. I learned, for instance, that the odourless and tasteless qualities of the Paper Birch's finely grained but soft wood makes it ideal for making toothpicks, tongue depressors, and popsicle sticks. And the outer layer of a piece of its bark will ignite even when wet. Indigenous people used it to make bowls, baskets, shelters, and canoes.

For ease of use, each Walk is colour coded with its own map where the trees are numbered for easy reference in the text where growing conditions

and native habitats are discussed. Over 800 stunning colour and archival photographs profile the trees through close-up views of their shape, leaf structure, flowers, bark and fruit.

The book includes a glossary of terms and an extensive bibliography, indexes of common tree names in English and French, as well as their botanical names.

The authors are forestry specialists Eric Jones and Roman Popadiouk, and photographer and writer Richard Hinchcliff. Their love of the Farm is evident in the book's carefully researched details. With this publication, they are inviting us to take a peaceful stroll among the trees and along the gentle pathways of the Farm, while enlightening us about the critically important aspects of trees in mitigating air pollution, moderating temperatures, and so much more.

For information on how to purchase the book, visit friendsofthefarm.ca.

Carolyn Quinn is a Heritage Ottawa board member and citizen member of the City of Ottawa Built Heritage Committee.

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GIVING TUESDAY **MARDI JE DONNE**



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The first **\$15,000** raised will be matched by a generous Patron Donor and our board of directors.

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Only with your support can we continue to be heard.
You help make a difference!

Notre appel aux dons de l'automne est en cours pour aider à assurer la vitalité de Patrimoine Ottawa. Vous pouvez **DOUBLER** votre apport! Les premiers **15 000 \$** reçus seront égalés par une généreuse commanditaire premium et notre conseil d'administration.

VISITEZ patrimoineottawa.org pour faire un don via notre compte sécurisé CanadaDon, où envoyer un chèque à Patrimoine Ottawa, 2, avenue Daly, Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6E2

C'est seulement avec votre appui que nous pouvons continuer à nous faire entendre. Vous pouvez agir!